

Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project

**Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Priest Lake Ranger District
Proposed Action
November 2006**

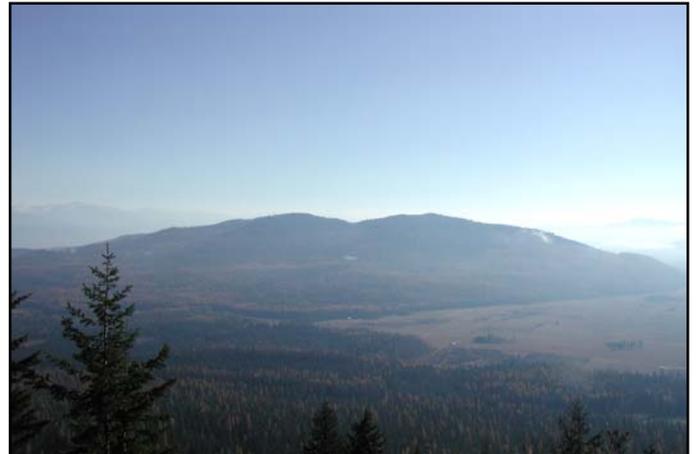
Introduction

The Priest Lake Ranger District has been planning a hazardous fuel reduction project on National Forest System (NFS) lands called the Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project.

During the past year we sent two notices to the public about this project and have held multiple field trips and meetings to encourage discussion and collaboration among all of the interested “stakeholders”. We used input and ideas from those efforts to develop the proposed action

presented herein, as well as to determine the environmental issues and level of analysis that we should include into the Draft Environmental

Impact Statement (DEIS). The proposed action in this notice describes the type of activities we are proposing to conduct and where those activities would occur. Please review this proposal and the enclosed maps. Then provide us with your comments. Near the end of this notice you will find more information about how to comment. Comments will be accepted until December 15, 2006.



The first portion of this notice provides background information about where the project is located, our collaboration process with various stakeholders, the purpose and need for proposing the project and a summary of our Forest Plan direction for this area. For those of you that are already familiar with this project, you may wish to skip to more detailed discussion beginning in the “Proposed Action” section of this notice, located on page 8.

Project Location

The Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project is located on National Forest System (NFS) lands centered around the community of Nordman, Idaho, as well as the Granite Creek, Kalispell Creek and Reeder Bay areas along the west side of Priest Lake. The enclosed maps show the project area. The general project area extends from Kalispell Bay, Hanna Flats and Bismark Mountain areas in the south to Indian Mountain, Granite Mountain and Copper Bay to the north. This area is a mixture of both NFS lands and private property and is one of the more populated areas within the greater Priest Lake area. Residential homes, subdivisions, businesses and popular recreational sites are abundant. The Lakeview-Reeder project area encompasses approximately 29,380 acres. Scattered within that area, over 5,800 acres are privately-owned and several dozen miles of boundary exist between private and National Forest ownership.

The legal description of the project area includes the following areas in Bonner County, Idaho: sections 25-26 and 33-36 of Township 62 North, Range 5 West of the Boise Meridian; sections 1-29 and sections 32-36 of Township 61 North, Range 5 West of the Boise Meridian; sections 1-4

and 10-12 of Township 60 North, Range 5 West of the Boise Meridian; sections 30-31 of Township 62 North, Range 4 West of the Boise Meridian; sections 4-9, 16-20 and 29-32 of Township 61 North, Range 4 West of the Boise Meridian; and sections 5-7 of Township 60 North, Range 4 West of the Boise Meridian in Bonner County, Idaho. In Pend Oreille County, Washington, the project area includes section 36 of Township 37 North, Range 45 East of the Willamette Meridian; sections 1 of Township 36 North, Range 45 East of the Willamette Meridian; and sections 6-7 of Township 36 North, Range 46 East of the Willamette Meridian.

How did we get here? Our Collaborative Efforts...

This section provides a summary of how this project was initially identified for consideration, and how we have progressed from that point to the development of this proposed action. This project qualifies as an authorized fuel reduction project under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). HFRA requires that projects be developed in a collaborative manner. The Implementation Plan describes collaboration at the local level as:

Local level collaboration should involve participants with direct responsibility for management decisions affecting public and/or private land and resources, fire protection responsibilities, or good working knowledge and interest in local resources. Participants should include Tribal representatives, local representatives from Federal and State agencies, local governments, landowners and other stakeholders, and community-based groups with a demonstrated commitment to achieving the strategy's four goals.

Collaboration has been ongoing throughout the planning process for the Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project. To demonstrate this, we have summarized the process from the initial identification of this area as an important area of consideration for fuel reduction efforts, to the development of this proposed action.

In 2004, Bonner County, Idaho, in collaboration with the Idaho Department of Lands, the USDA Forest Service and other federal, state and local agencies, finalized a plan to mitigate wildland fire risks in the county. The plan, called the Bonner County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation (BCWUIFM) plan, was the compilation of collaborative efforts between those agencies, private landowners and other interested stakeholders, following the adoption of the National Fire Plan (2000) and in compliance with the Disaster Mitigation Act (2000). The plan defines the county's wildland urban interface (WUI) areas, assesses general wildland fire risk and outlines a strategic plan for wildfire preparedness and protection. Within the plan, the committee identified different areas (across ownerships) that require fuel reduction treatments and then prioritized those areas based on the fuel hazard, topography, vegetation, fire history and frequency, as well as the values at risk (like housing density, infrastructure or natural resources.)

Concurrently, Pend Oreille County, Washington also developed a "Community Wildfire Protection Plan" which includes significant discussions and assessments about wildland fire hazards across ownerships in the county, as well as detailed definitions of wildland urban interface and critical infrastructure. The plan outlined many of the areas within the Lakeview-Reeder project area as a moderate to high risk and qualified the Indian Mountain Lookout as critical infrastructure.

The entire Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project area lies within a “Community Wildfire Protection Plan”- defined WUI. In addition, the National Fire Plan identified the area around Nordman, Idaho as an “At-Risk Community”. Shortly after both Bonner County, Idaho and Pend Oreille County, Washington protection plans identified areas near Nordman and Reeder Bay as high-risk and/or critical to public infrastructure, the Priest Lake Ranger District began considering National Forest System (NFS) lands in the area for fuel reduction treatments. During the fall of 2004 and spring/summer of 2005, foresters and fuel specialists began surveying forest stands in the area, evaluating the stands in terms of their fire hazard potential (which relates to vegetation types and quantity, canopy base height, canopy density, ground fuels and historic forest composition and ecology), adjacency to existing fuel breaks, topography, prevailing winds, as well as proximity to potential ignition sources, private property, homes and egress routes.

After a cursory fuel hazard assessment was completed and the risk to the community was confirmed, the Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project planning process began. On February 2, 2005, Priest Lake Ranger District staff participated in a meeting hosted by BonFIRE, which is a funding off-shoot of the Bonner County WUI Fire Mitigation Planning Committee to help private landowners complete fuel reduction work on their own property. At that meeting, Forest Service staff discussed many planned and ongoing fuel reduction projects across the District, including the area around Nordman and Reeder Bay. At that meeting, those interested in the Lakeview-Reeder project were invited to attend a preliminary planning session on February 17, 2005.

At the February 17 meeting, Priest Lake Ranger District staff discussed some of the initial determinations of hazardous fuel conditions and possible management strategies. At that meeting, some of the public raised questions about potential issues including access, wildlife corridors, grizzly bear habitat, water quality, recreation and visual considerations.

After further field surveys and interdisciplinary team meetings by District specialists, an informal scoping was sent out to nearly 800 interested individuals and groups on October 28, 2005 to solicit feedback about the potential Lakeview-Reeder project. That first scoping effort resulted in nearly 90 responses, most echoing very similar potential issues to those discussed at the first public meeting and at interdisciplinary team meetings.

On April 4, 2006, we sent out another scoping notice. This second notice provided more discussions of the fire risk in the area and of the potential environmental effects and trade-offs of various treatment types and levels. Three different potential treatment levels were presented to the public in this notice to generate comments regarding how much hazard should be mitigated and the potential environmental tradeoffs. In addition to the scoping notices that were sent out, District staff presented the same information at seven local meetings—Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce, West Priest Lake Volunteer Fire Department, Priest Lake Trails & Snowmobile Club, Lakeface Lamb Stewardship Monitoring Committee Meeting, Priest Community Forest Connection and Selkirk Conservation Alliance. Forty-six individuals or groups responded in writing to that second, informal scoping.

During the summer of 2006, foresters and fuel specialists visited with individuals who, during scoping efforts, expressed interest in specific forest stands or areas. Many of these people are adjacent landowners who would be directly affected by whatever actions may be undertaken. Many visits involved walking through the stands to observe actual conditions, as well as

discussions about ecological processes, feasible site-specific fuel reduction treatment activities and possible environmental effects.

On August 3 and 5, 2006, the Priest Lake Ranger District hosted Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project field trips, at which 26 individuals and 5 Forest Service employees discussed the project, stopped to look at stands with hazardous fuel conditions, looked at similar stands post-treatment in the Lakeface Lamb project area and considered potential effects of the project. Many project-related issues were discussed at length, including possible impacts to soils; water quality; threatened, endangered and sensitive plant and animal species; grizzly bears and Bear Management Unit (BMU) core habitat; visuals/ scenic qualities; recreation; future access; and the potential for increased resource damage caused by ATV or off-road recreation. Other factors such as wildland fire preparedness, landscape fire potential and risk, as well as personal responsibility were debated. Possible design criteria and mitigation measures, which could either negate or minimize potential detrimental impacts to resources, were also discussed during the field trip.

Purpose and Need— Why should we pursue this project?

This purpose and need addresses the goals and objectives set forth in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' (IPNF) Forest Plan (1987), National Fire Plan, Healthy Forests Initiative, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (2003), Bonner County, Idaho Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan and the Pend Oreille County, Washington Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This purpose and need also responds to ecological recommendations made in the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. The District hopes to achieve two primary goals through proposing this project:

- **Reduce hazardous forest fuels within the project area to decrease the risk of a wildfire negatively impacting the communities in the project area, public and firefighter safety, public infrastructure, private and National Forest System lands and resource values.**
- **Restore, enhance and protect forest ecosystem components to improve forest health, increase biological diversity, as well as reduce threats from catastrophic wildfire and insect and disease infestations.**

A large portion of the project area consists of forest stands that regenerated densely following the last large-scale ecological disturbances over 80 years ago. Many environmental factors, which interact with and sometimes exacerbate one another, have resulted in significant tree mortality within those stands. Factors which have been affecting tree mortality in the project area include drought conditions, high tree densities, competition (for light, water and nutrients), insect and disease pathogens, as well as windthrow and breakage. As some trees die excessive ground fuels often accumulate, and subsequent flushes of tree regeneration can result, leading to dense, live ladder fuels in the understory. Many of the forest stands in this condition occur over large, continuous expanses, often in proximity to private developments, public infrastructure or other resource values. In addition to those environmental stressors listed, human activities including the introduction of white pine blister rust disease, successful fire suppression efforts and certain logging practices that occurred historically have substantially changed the species diversity,

composition, landscape ecology, disturbance regimes and nutrient cycle of forest stands in the project area over the last century.

The current fuel conditions pose a direct threat to both natural resources and developments in and adjacent to the project area. These natural resources and developments are of considerable, often immeasurable value, both locally and regionally, and include wildlife habitat, clean air, clean water, healthy forests, homes, cabins, businesses, timber land, grazing land, recreational sites, historic and archaeological sites, roads, power lines and other critical public infrastructure. Because of the risk of losing these values, it is socially unacceptable to allow fire to resume its historic role as a landscape, stand-replacing ecological disturbance, particularly within the wildland urban interface. Therefore, fire suppression will continue in this area. However, in the event of a wildfire in the project area, the topography and current fuel conditions could result in severe fire behavior, with flame lengths, spread rates and fire intensities greater than firefighters could safely and effectively suppress. Moreover, in many forest stands a fire could easily move into the crowns of the trees, further impeding suppression efforts.

Because protection of the natural resource and development values in the project area is important and successful fire suppression efforts in this area could be difficult or impossible under certain weather conditions, there is a clear need to reduce fuels within the project area to alter potential fire behavior. Fuel reduction activities would reduce the negative impacts of a severe wildfire to the values described, create safer conditions for both the public and firefighters and provide for more effective fire suppression.

Fuel reduction immediately adjacent to private land and developments would provide a defensible space where firefighters could safely suppress smaller fires spreading from private land onto NFS lands or spreading from NFS lands to private lands. However, limiting fuel reduction to areas adjacent to private land alone would neither protect other resource values nor provide adequate protection from a larger, fast-moving fire event. Fuel reduction efforts in key locations throughout the project area would disrupt both fuel quantity and continuity and would create strategic fuel breaks that greatly modify the behavior of potential wildfires, as well as diminish the risk from a large fire. Potential spread rates and fire intensities would be lowered, improving the ability to successfully suppress fires and effectively reduce risks to life, property, natural resources and other values.

As with most areas in the Priest Lake basin, this project area has had a significant history of both natural and human-caused wildfires. In the late 1800's and again in 1926, a large percentage of this project area burned over in hot, fast moving fires that eventually became tens of thousands of acres in size. The 1926 wildfire reached approximately 100,000 acres in size. Since 1926, the project area has not experienced any large fires. Rather, fire suppression efforts have successfully kept fires relatively small.

Since the 1950's (when good fire record keeping began) dozens of natural and human-caused fires have occurred within the project area. By putting these small fires out, forest fuels have continued to accumulate in many forest stands in the area and are now at high levels. Without treating some of the fuels, the probability of successfully suppressing future fires is decreasing. In addition, more development and public use is taking place in the project area than ever before. Therefore, the number of human-caused wildfires will likely increase in coming years.

Restoration, enhancement, and protection of forest ecosystem components is complementary to, if not necessary, to achieving our first goal—hazardous fuel reductions. In order to achieve a long-

term, landscape fuel condition that would result in lower intensity or mixed severity, mosaic fire events, the forest ecosystem must be restored to one that would have occurred historically in low- to mixed-severity fire regimes. Ecosystem components including forest cover, species composition and structure, can be restored to levels within the historic range of variability to achieve both fuel reduction and forest restoration objectives.

Historically, in areas that evolved under a mixed-severity fire regime, even in a moist ecosystem, many of the forest stands would have incurred low-intensity fires (which creep around in the duff) at least once to twice during the stand's life. Those low-intensity fires often killed groups of seedlings/saplings and the occasional mature tree, as well as reduced accumulations of duff and ground fuels. As a result, thick-barked, long-lived, fire-resistant species, such as western larch, ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir would have been favored, and occasional fires would have helped limit the number of trees per acres. Additionally, stands in similar areas with low- and mixed-intensity fire regimes usually had not only fewer trees per acre, especially in the understory, but also had much larger trees in the overstory than the forest stands that dominate the landscape today. These more open, mature forest structures have declined in the sub-basin and have been replaced by dense stands of immature/medium size trees.

Other environmental and human-caused factors have also impacted the forests during the last century. After decades of successful fire suppression, fires' role of regenerating forest stands through the creation of both small and large openings has declined. Consequently, the only tree species successfully regenerating within many of these stands in recent years are the shade-tolerant species, such as grand fir, subalpine fir, hemlock and cedar. These species are not only fire-intolerant, but the true firs and hemlock are also susceptible to many of our endemic root rot diseases and insects. These factors have influenced the increase in ground fuel accumulations within the stands. In addition, these tree species can grow in higher densities due to their shade tolerance and have denser crowns and lower canopy base heights that increase the live, ladder fuel component of the stand. Live, ladder fuels have exponentially increased the fuel continuity from the ground up through the entire tree canopy, increasing the likelihood of high-severity, stand-replacing crown fire events in the future (which kill even fire-resistant species). All of these factors are contributing not only to increased competition, mortality and hazardous fuel conditions, but also to potential decrease in the stand's survivability and resilience to future fires.

The forest stands' current species composition, densities and forest structure in the project area is less resistant to natural disturbances and environmental stressors than those that occurred historically. By restoring fire- and drought-resistant tree species to the composition levels that occurred historically, long-term forest health will be improved and the risk of insect and disease outbreaks, as well as large, severe wildfires will be reduced. Additionally, habitat for those wildlife species associated with low- and mixed-severity fire regimes will also be increased over current conditions.

Forest Plan Direction for the Area

In 1987, The Idaho Panhandle National Forests adopted a Land and Resource Management Plan that provides guidance on how the forests are to be managed. This "Forest Plan" (FP) set management goals and established standards and guidelines to follow in accomplishing those goals. Although the FP is currently being revised through a joint effort with the Kootenai National Forest, the 1987 FP is still the overall guiding management document for the IPNF. The IPNF Forest Plan designated Management Areas (MA) to guide the management of National Forest

System lands within the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. Each MA provides for a combination of activities, practices and uses appropriate to the management goals and objectives of that specific management area. The Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction project area is comprised of lands in five different MAs. Most of the land within this project area is either in MA 1 or MA 4. Lesser amounts of MA 9, 14 and 16 are also present. A short summary of the management area goals for these different MAs is presented below. The DEIS will contain detailed information about project consistence with Forest Plan direction, including Forest Plan amendments.

Management Area 1- Management Area 1 consists of lands designated for timber production. Management goals are to manage suitable timber production lands for long-term growth and production of commercially valuable wood products. Within this project area, these MA-1 lands are concentrated in the vicinity of Hanna Flats, as well as Lakeview, Nickleplate, Reeder and Indian Mountains.

Management Area 4 - Management Area 4 consists of lands designated for timber production within big game winter range. Achieving the MA 4 goal requires providing sufficient forage to support big game habitat needs through scheduled timber harvest and permanent forage areas. Within this project area, these MA-4 areas are mostly located along the shoreline of Priest Lake between Kalispell Bay and Reeder Bay and towards Watson and Granite Mountains.

Management Area 9- Management Area 9 consists of areas of non-forest lands, lands not capable of producing industrial products, lands physically unsuited for timber production and lands capable of timber production but isolated by the above type lands or nonpublic ownership. Management goals are to maintain and protect existing improvements, resource productive potential and meet visual quality objectives. Within this project area, these MA-9 lands are located towards the top of Bismark Mountain and in Bismark Meadows.

Management Area 14- Management Area 14 consists of areas to be utilized for scientific research and includes the existing and candidate Research Natural Areas (RNA's). Within the project area, these lands occur in the Potholes Research Natural Area located in the Kalispell drainage along the western edge of the project area.

Management Area 16- This management area consists of floodplains, wetlands, streams and other riparian areas. These MA-16 lands are scattered over the project area. In 1995, the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) replaced the previous Forest Plan direction for the management of these riparian areas. The standards and guidelines under INFS now provide the management direction for these areas.

In addition to the MA direction above, the FP contains overall goals, objectives and standards relevant to the entire IPNF. Within this direction are many items including the management of forest fuels, fire protection, fire suppression, old growth, recreation, visual qualities, soil and water resources, as well as threatened, endangered, sensitive and management indicator species (MIS) of wildlife and plants. This direction was used during the development of this proposed action.

Proposed Action

As you may remember from the last scoping notice that we mailed out (April 4, 2006) we developed three potential fuel treatment levels—levels 1, 2 and 3. Each of these levels showed differing amounts of fuel treatments within the project area and therefore, would lessen the fire risk to different degrees. Level 1 showed treatment of the fewest acres, and level 3 showed treatment of the greatest number of acres. Level 2 fell between the two. In that scoping notice, we asked you which level of treatment you felt that we should pursue and why. Among other things, we wanted to get a sense of how comfortable you, the public, were “living” with different degrees of wildfire risk, as well as to what degree you felt we should be responsible for reducing that risk. Although we received differing responses from the scoping notice and our follow-up meetings with various community groups, it became evident that most of the stakeholders want us to take an aggressive approach to mitigating the wildfire risk in the project area.

Although I did consider all of the comments as I contemplated which level of treatment we should propose, I tended to place more “weight” on those comments we received from the following three categories of respondents. I paid close attention to input we received from participants who have fire protection obligations or other responsibilities dealing with public safety and the protection of private and public land and resources (i.e. the local rural fire departments, the highway department, the county emergency management department and others involved with the county wildfire mitigation group-BonFIRE.) Second, I carefully considered comments from those that live and/or own property in the project area, as these are the people who will be directly affected by decisions about this project. Lastly, I listened carefully to recommendations from my own staff members, who have a tremendous amount of combined experience in fire suppression, the management of hazardous fuels and forest ecology.

Through this process, I have decided to propose treatments at a level similar to the level 3 we presented in the last informal scoping notice. Of the three levels we presented, this level would take a more aggressive approach to reducing the current wildfire hazard in the area. While I did hear that some people wanted us to be even more aggressive than level 3 in reducing hazardous fuels, I believe that level 3 would lower the wildfire risk effectively, while still maintaining all of the other project area resources in an acceptable condition.

Since we sent out the map of level 3 in the previous scoping notice, we have made some changes to a small percentage of the treatment areas. Those changes were based on public input as well as our own additional field work. Therefore, the map of proposed treatment areas presented in this notice is slightly different than the level 3 map presented in the previous scoping notice.

Proposed Fuel Reduction and Forest Restoration Treatment Activities

Forest Stand Treatments

There are approximately 29,380 acres¹ within the project area, and we are proposing to conduct fuel treatments on approximately 8,375 acres², or 29% of that area. As discussed in more detail

¹ All of the acreages provided in this notice are approximations typically based on GIS data and/or aerial photography.

below, we are proposing to treat the hazardous fuels and forest vegetation in one of four methods, depending upon the site-specific conditions that occur in each of the forest stands. The enclosed fuel treatment map illustrates where these fuel treatments would occur in the project area. A discussion of the four treatment types is provided below to help you understand what they would entail and why we are proposing to use them.

Thin: Forest stands proposed for treatment that contain numerous, healthy trees of a desirable species would be “commercially thinned”³. Of the total 8,375 acres proposed for fuel and forest restoration treatments, approximately 2,816 acres, or 34%, would be treated using this commercial thinning treatment. Thinning would selectively remove smaller trees and those trees contributing greatest to the hazardous fuel conditions, while emphasizing retention of larger trees and those trees which tend to be longer-lived and/or more resistant to insect and disease infestations. After thinning, the hazardous fuels would then either be mechanically piled and subsequently burned (this would occur over 2,375 acres), or the fuels would be left un-piled and a broadcast burn⁴ would be ignited under prescribed conditions (this would occur over 441 acres). On the enclosed map, the areas proposed for commercial thinning treatments are delineated on the map legend as “Thin”.

Regeneration: Stands that have fewer healthy trees or high densities of tree species which tend to be shorter-lived and/or less resistant to insect and disease infestations, would generally be treated with a “regeneration cut”⁵. Following harvest, new seedlings would be planted in the openings created. This regeneration cutting would be performed over approximately 4,177 acres, or 50%, of the total treatment area. On the map provided, the treatment areas proposed for regeneration cutting are delineated in the map legend as “Regeneration”. After the regeneration cutting, the hazardous fuels would then either be mechanically piled and subsequently burned (this would occur over 2,579 acres), or the fuels would be left un-piled and a broadcast burn would be ignited under prescribed conditions (this would occur over 1,598 acres). After the hazardous fuels are burned, a mix of site-appropriate conifer seedling species would be planted in the treatment areas.

Burn Only: The third type of treatment that we are proposing to conduct is titled “Burn Only” in the legend on the enclosed treatment map. This treatment type would be conducted on approximately 1,279 acres, or 15%, of the total treatment area. In comparison with the first two treatment types discussed above, the Burn Only treatment would not involve cutting and removing any trees of a merchantable size. In these treatment units, some small (unmerchantable) trees and shrubs might be cut down to create desirable fuel conditions for burning. Then, these areas would be broadcast burned to help reduce the quantity of hazardous fuels and modify their condition. Many of these Burn Only areas are currently dominated by old shrub fields with interspersed conifer patches. Burning these “shrub fields” would reduce the dead fuels in these areas and encourage new sprouting. This would enhance the ability of these shrub fields to act as fuel

² In most instances, the treatment acres provided in this notice will decrease as we “buffer” wetlands, riparian areas, sensitive plant locations, archaeological sites and other resources that we determine could be negatively affected by fuel treatments.

³ Commercial thinning is thinning a forest stand, when at least some of the trees cut are of a merchantable or commercial size. Those trees are usually cut and removed with harvesting equipment.

⁴ A broadcast burn is a fire that is purposely ignited over a designated area to achieve certain management objectives, under very specific, prescribed conditions.

⁵ Regeneration cutting is the removal of trees in a stand to make the regeneration of a new stand possible. In this proposal, regeneration cutting would typically involve cutting and removing the majority of the merchantable trees in the stand.

breaks, while at the same time creating more desirable browse for deer, elk and moose. A smaller number of the Burn Only treatment areas that we are proposing to treat are relatively old aspen stands. These aspen stands would be broadcast burned to reduce the dead wood and shrub/conifer competition within the stands, in an effort to regenerate a new, vigorous stand of aspen trees.

Pile and Burn: The final type of treatment we are proposing to use is one that we have titled “Pile and Burn” on the enclosed treatment map. This treatment type would be used on approximately 103 acres and would entail cutting some of the small, unmerchantable trees in these areas and piling the slash. In certain areas, the smaller trees that need removed may be cut using machinery versus by hand, depending upon site conditions. The slash would be piled by machine (79 acres) in some places and by hand in other locations (24 acres). Fuel piles would be burned under prescribed conditions.

Harvest Methods

In the commercial thinning and regeneration treatment areas, merchantable trees would be removed using different types of harvesting or skidding methods depending upon site and resource conditions. Of the total 6,993 acres proposed for thinning or regeneration treatments, approximately 1,277 acres would be harvested using helicopters, 268 acres by cable systems and 5,448 acres by ground-based machinery (such as tractors, skidders or harvester/forwarder equipment). In general, the more steep and inaccessible areas would be harvested using the helicopter and/or cable harvest systems, while the more gentle and accessible areas would be harvested by one of the ground based harvest systems.

The merchantable byproducts of the fuel reduction activities (i.e. sawlogs and other wood products) would be sold to help pay for both the fuel reduction activities, as well as for other resource improvement activities that are discussed later in this notice. The types of fuel reduction treatments necessary for many of the forest stands in the project area will be costly, as will some of the other resource improvement activities. As a result, we will strive to implement a project that utilizes the by-products of fuel reduction activities to help fund the project activities and other opportunities. Certainly, the obvious merchantable by-products of such a project are sawlogs, which can be sold for lumber production. Other possible products include small material, like roundwood (which can be milled into small lumber), hewwood, pulp, chips, etc, depending upon markets and demand at the time. Due to the size of the project, the activities would likely be divided into multiple contracts that could take place over a 3-10 year period.

Road Work Needed to Access Treatment Areas

In order to adequately access the fuel reduction and forest restoration treatment areas, some road maintenance, reconstruction and construction activities would be required. In addition, while conducting the road work necessary to access the treatment areas, additional measures would be taken to improve the condition of some of the existing roads, in an effort to reduce the potential for sediment delivery to nearby streams.

The proposed action includes constructing approximately six miles of new road, five of which would be permanent road and the remaining mile would be temporary. The temporary road would be obliterated after using it for this project. In addition, eight miles of existing roads would be reconstructed and approximately 36.5 miles of road would require maintenance activities. The

enclosed road map illustrates the locations and types of roadwork being proposed within the project area.

On the roads proposed for reconstruction activities, different types of activities would be necessary to improve their condition. Many of these activities would be conducted to reduce the amount of sediment production and/or to make the roads safer for travel. Such activities include replacing damaged culverts or culverts that are too small, installing relief culverts in ditch lines, adding gravel surfacing, creating rolling dips or water bars, roadside brushing and roadbed blading. To a lesser degree, some additional work will include realigning small portions of a few roads to help reduce road grades, lessen sharp corners or in some instances, increase the width of existing narrow roadways.

On roads proposed for maintenance activities, most of the work would include roadside brushing, blading and spot gravelling.

In addition to the needed road work discussed above that would occur on NFS lands, some use of existing roads across private lands would also be required in order to access some of the proposed fuel treatment areas. In various locations in the project area, the Forest Service would pursue acquiring permission to use approximately 6.5 miles of existing roads on private property. Approximately four miles of these roads would require some maintenance activities prior to use.

Other Proposed Activities

In addition to the proposed activities described above, additional activities may be necessary to mitigate (eliminate or reduce) potential negative effects of the project or may provide an opportunity to improve resource conditions in the project area. Those activities deemed necessary as mitigation would be required as part of the fuel treatment and forest restoration activities. Those activities identified by resource specialists as improvement opportunities would occur as funding becomes available. We are including these mitigation activities and resource improvement opportunities in the proposed action so that resource specialists can analyze the potential resulting effects in the environmental document. In that way, as funding and staff resources become available to work on these projects, we would be prepared to implement them.

Aquatic Resources

As mentioned in earlier scoping notices, there are three streams within the project area that have been listed on the 303(d) list by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality as water quality limited streams - Kalispell, Granite and Reeder Creeks. These streams either exhibit sediment loads or high temperatures thought to be degrading the streams. Therefore, if in the process of conducting the fuel treatments and associated road work, we cause an increase in either sediment or temperature to these streams, we are required to conduct some other activities that would offset or mitigate those effects and have at least a small net overall improvement to the streams. Because we have not conducted a thorough analysis yet regarding how the proposed fuel treatment and associated road treatments would affect the streams, we do not know how much "mitigation" activity will be needed to offset the effects of our project activities. However, at this time, we do believe that some additional road improvement work will probably be necessary to mitigate the

effects of the project. There are many activities which may either offset project activities or be an improvement opportunity by improving stream quality and function. These potential activities include:

1. **Road 308 relocation.**—Along the middle portion of Kalispell Creek, the 308 road parallels, and is very close to, the stream for several miles. For some time, we have been considering a project that would obliterate a portion of this road segment and in its place, establish another road segment that would serve to connect the two remaining segments. This project would involve removing approximately three miles of the 308 road where it is encroaching on the riparian zone, as well as constructing and reconstructing a piece of road that would connect the remaining two pieces of the 308 road. The new construction would be approximately 1.8 miles and additional reconstruction approximately 3.6 miles. The new route would come off of the 1362 road, head west and eventually tie into the existing 308 road in the vicinity of the 308C road.
2. **Improvement of existing, open roads to reduce sediment delivery to streams.** – Some of the drivable roads within the project area, and many of the roads within the larger watershed, will not be necessary to complete project activities. However, some of these roads could be improved in order to reduce the amount of sediment that they are generating and potentially delivering to nearby streams, as well as to reduce the potential of a future road failure as a result of a culvert that is too small or becomes plugged. In the DEIS, we will include a list of roads that fit into this category of opportunities, detailing the type of work that would need performed.
3. **Decommission roads that are not needed for future land management activities, or store roads that we do not believe will be needed for a long time.**— Within or adjacent to the project area, some roads (most of which are currently undrivable) could be placed in “storage” or decommissioned (depending upon whether or not they would be needed in the future). From the perspective of aquatics, this would reduce the potential that these roads would incur a culvert failure and harm streams in the future. In the DEIS, these roads will be listed.
4. **Stream restructuring within Kalispell Creek.**—Limited removal of alder shrubs within the Kalispell Creek stream channel is proposed. This has been conducted in the past in an effort to allow the stream to “scour” out excess deposits in the channel, which have been held in place by the alder root systems.
5. **Constructing fish habitat structures.**—Within the lower portion of Granite Creek, fish habitat could be improved by constructing some large woody debris jams into the stream. In addition, smaller fish habitat structures would be constructed in Kalispell, Indian, Kita and the upper portion of Reeder Creek.
6. **Eliminate fish barriers.**—Within the project area or within the larger watersheds that the project area occurs within, there are 13 known fish barriers currently preventing fish from freely moving up and down streams. Most of these are road culverts that are either too small, or were installed in such a way so that they create a fish passage barrier. These fish barriers can have negative effects on fish populations in several ways, and removing or replacing the culverts so that fish can easily move through them is desirable. The following roads have one or more of these barriers: 302, 308, 1340, 1347, 1362, 1373, and 1376. The

proposed action includes replacing the necessary culvert barriers or otherwise removing the fish passage barriers.

Grizzly Bear Security

Although we have not completed a detailed analysis yet to determine exactly the extent that our proposed project activities (and associated road work) would affect the grizzly bear core and security habitat, we do know that some of the proposed activities will decrease the core habitat in the area and increase road densities. Therefore, these affects will have to be mitigated by changing the current condition of some of the other roads within the bear management units. At a minimum, we are required to have a neutral overall affect on the amount of grizzly bear core habitat and road densities in the bear unit. Therefore, as we conduct the analysis and mapping process that will be required to determine how the fuel treatment and associated road work would affect the grizzly bear habitat, we will be identifying some changes that will need to occur to other roads within the bear management units to mitigate potential negative effects. Although we do not anticipate needing to change the status of all the roads below, the table below lists roads we will consider for status changes. The table also describes the potential changes associated with each road.

In addition, by 2013 the Idaho Panhandle National Forest is required to meet minimum habitat standards within the two grizzly bear management units (BMUs) that occur within the project area—the Lakeshore Grizzly Bear Management Unit and Kalispell-Granite Grizzly Bear Management Unit. In order to accomplish this, most of the changes that will need to occur to roads within the BMUs will involve changing the status of some roads so that those currently in a restricted category (meaning that they are closed to summer motorized use) may become completely unusable for any summer motorized use for at least a 10-year period. This would create more core grizzly bear habitat and provide an opportunity for grizzly bear core habitat improvement. The individual roads that we propose to be selected for this status will be listed in the DEIS. However, they will be selected from road table presented below.

Road Number and General Location	Current Status	Potential Changes
638 B&C (Granite Mountain)	638B is open for a short distance until reaching a washout at which point the remainder of 638B as well as all of 638C are inaccessible.	These roads could be placed into storage ⁶ to increase core habitat.
1340 (Fedar Creek)	A portion of this road is closed w/gate for bear security. The remainder is open to the public.	All, or a portion, of this road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat, or the entire road system could be gated to decrease open road densities for grizzly bear.
2249 (Distillery Bay)	Currently closed w/gate for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.

⁶ A storage road is one that is effectively closed to motorized vehicle use for the long-term; however, the road is kept as part of the forest transportation system. A road in storage is a road which is hydrologically stabilized, the road bed is ripped and seeded with a site-appropriate seed mix and the road is effectively closed with an earthen berm or barricade, but the road prism remains intact for potential future use.

Road Number and General Location	Current Status	Potential Changes
337 (Virgin Creek)	Currently closed w/guardrail barricade for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.
1014 (Boulder Meadows)	Currently closed w/guardrail barricade for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.
1376, 1376A, 112A&B (Zero Creek)	Currently closed w/gate for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.
1324 and 1324 A&B (Reeder Mountain)	Currently closed w/gate for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.
1373,1373A (Packer Creek)	Currently closed w/gate for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.
1127 & 656 (Hemlock Loop)	Currently closed w/gate for bear security.	Road could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.
313E, 313F (Bismark Mountain)	313F is open to the public. A portion of the 313E is open, while another portion has been in storage.	All or a portion of these roads could be placed in storage to increase grizzly bear core habitat.

Scenery Restoration

Years ago, an area below the Indian Mountain lookout was timber harvested in a manner that does not currently meet our scenery management objectives. As seen from highway 57, as well as from portions of Priest Lake, the harvest area appears somewhat like a square “postage stamp” placed on the mountain. The boundary between the edges of the opening and the adjacent, dense forest is abrupt and forms straight lines that appear very artificial. (Photos of this area, as seen from different vantage points along Highway 57, can be viewed on the website.) Through this larger fuel reduction project, we can address this issue and make the old clearcut blend into the surrounding landscape to a better degree. In more recent projects, the Forest Service has designed treatments in visually sensitive areas to mimic vegetative patterns found in the surrounding landscape. Instead of making square edges or straight lines, the openings created during harvesting mimic the shape and pattern of openings seen in the surrounding landscape, with larger groups of trees left within and between openings. This approach is not only more visually acceptable, but also mimics ecological processes and creates wildlife habitat conditions more similar to those resulting from environmental disturbances.

1. 162 acres additional regeneration harvest (19 acres- ground based equipment and 143 acres- skyline harvest) would be necessary to blend the existing clearcut into the surrounding landscape. Additionally, 2.75 miles of additional road maintenance would be needed.

Relevant Issues

Many potential issues pertaining to the Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project have already surfaced during informal scoping, public collaboration and interdisciplinary team meetings. Potential issues which may entail detailed analysis or require mitigation include:

- Wildfire hazard- defining the risk and decreasing the risk of negative impacts from large-scale, catastrophic fire events to local communities, private property, public infrastructure and other valuable resources
- Forest health- improving the long-term health and resilience of forest stands in the project area
- Long-term maintenance- How will we ensure future maintenance of treated areas?
- Threatened, endangered, sensitive (TES), and management indicator species (MIS) of wildlife (and their habitat)
- Aquatic resources (including TES fish species, 303(d) listed TMDL watersheds, water yield, sediment yield, domestic water sources, floodplains, wetlands)
- Access- motorized access for private use and recreation
motorized access for administrative use(i.e. fire control, land management)
- Off-road motorized use- potential negative impacts, how to enforce regulations?
- Highway/ roadside safety- hazard trees, visibility, wildlife collisions
- Visuals- maintaining scenic integrity by complying with IPNF Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives
- Soil productivity- compaction, nutrient recycling, coarse woody debris, nutrient limitations (i.e. potassium), erosion potential, etc.
- TES and rare plant species- identification and protection of these plants
- Archaeological sites- identification and protection of heritage and archaeological sites
- Noxious weeds- both new introductions and dispersal of existing populations
- Old growth- maintaining adequate old growth stands on the District to meet FP direction
- Recreation- requests to increase recreational opportunities,
minimizing negative impacts to recreational users from project activities
- Financial analysis- ensuring that the project is economically feasible,
determining potential impacts of project on social resources

- Air quality- reducing the project's potential negative impacts to air quality
- Product utilization- Can we maximize product utilization to minimize the need for burning?
- Big game- minimizing negative impacts to big game security, winter range and travel corridors
- Regulations- Can we ensure compliance with IPNF Forest Plan Standards and guidelines, NEPA, as well as other federal and state regulations?

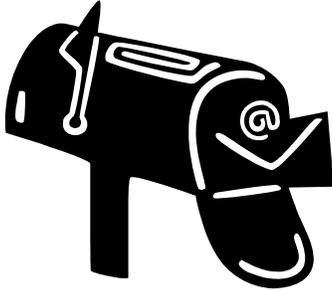
Because the project area does not contain any wilderness areas, roadless areas or range allotments, potential issues associated with these resources will not be addressed in the DEIS.

What are the next steps?

We will consider comments that we receive during this scoping period to further refine the project's activities, mitigation measures and resource improvement opportunities, as well as determine the depth of analysis our resource specialists will undertake. After considering those comments, we will begin analysis and development of the DEIS. Although that process is not a speedy one, we hope to expedite the decision process due to the project being undertaken as a Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) project. Resource specialists on the Interdisciplinary Team will use your comments from this scoping, along with their own expertise, to determine the pertinent issues to their resource. Then they will analyze the potential effects that this project and the associated opportunities may have on those resources. The results of these analyses and background research will then be disclosed in the DEIS. I am currently intending to analyze only one action alternative in the EIS, as required by HFRA. However, if there is a compelling reason for us to consider another potential alternative, I may choose to do so.

After that DEIS is published, you will have another opportunity to comment on the project and on the resource specialist findings. Once specialists on the interdisciplinary team look at the comments received during that "comment period", the environmental document may be revised or a final environmental document for the project may be issued. After the final document is published, the agency will allow for a 30-day objection period, after which, a reviewing officer must consider and address any objections to the project. Once objections have been addressed, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued prior to project implementation.

How can you comment on this Proposed Action?



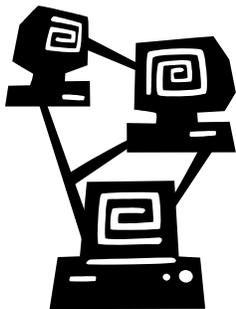
After reviewing this proposed action, we want your feedback. Please send us your comments, providing both your reasoning for support, as well as concerns or issues you feel are relevant to the project. Your opinions are very important to us. If you have internet access, please visit the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' website <http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa>. There you will find links to this and other NEPA projects on the Idaho Panhandle. Simply scroll down to "Priest Lake Ranger District" and "Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project." Because we realize that the maps we have enclosed do not provide a lot of detail, we will put larger scale maps on the website. In addition, for those of you that may be interested, we have placed not only the first two informal scoping notices on the website, but also the public comments that we received, as well as the "content analysis" we performed on those comments. The website also contains some photos of the fuel and site conditions in the project area, as well as examples of treatments that have been completed on other projects.

We also would like to know your level of interest in future involvement in this project. For your convenience, we are enclosing a response form that includes options for potential meetings, field trips and future mailings about the Lakeview-Reeder Fuel Reduction Project. Please check next to the items in which you are interested. Although there will be other opportunities to comment on this project, **please respond to this proposed action with your feedback no later than December 15, 2006.** Submit comments to:

David Cobb
Lakeview-Reeder Project Leader
Priest Lake Ranger District
32203 Highway 57
Priest River, ID 83856



Phone: 208-443-6854
Email: dcobb@fs.fed.us



Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments may not have standing to appeal or file objection to the subsequent decision.



Thank you for your time and consideration! We look forward to your continued interest and involvement in the management of your National Forest!